



CENTRE FOR MUSLIM WELLBEING

Response to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission Issues Paper #2 (March 2026)

Changes since the Royal Commission:
Perspectives on Responding to Mental
Health Crises in the Community
Date: 15 May 2026

CMW.ORG.AU



Acknowledgement



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem

In the name of Allah, The Most Compassionate, The Most Merciful

We begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live, work and gather, including the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, and all First Nations peoples across Victoria. We pay profound respect to Elders past and present, and honour their enduring connection to land, water, skies, and culture.

We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded—this has always been and always will be Aboriginal land. We stand in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, upholding shared values of justice, healing, dignity, and collective care.

Inspired by the divine attributes of Ar-Rahman (The Most Compassionate) and Ash-Shafee (The Healer), we affirm the strength, resilience and spiritual wellbeing of our Multicultural and Muslim communities. We honour the lived experiences of those we serve, whose voices guide our advocacy for systems that are compassionate, inclusive, and grounded in holistic wellbeing.

We are guided by Al-Adl (The Just) in our commitment to equity and fairness, Al-Wasi' (The All-Encompassing) in embracing the richness of diverse cultures and faiths, and Al-Hakeem (The All-Wise) in seeking thoughtful, evidence-informed solutions. We call upon An-Nur (The Light) to illuminate pathways of hope and healing, and As-Salaam (The Source of Peace) as we work towards environments that nurture peace, dignity and belonging for all.

Together, we strive to embody these divine values in service, policy, and community—fostering a Victoria where wellbeing is a shared right, and where all communities—especially those whose voices have been historically marginalised—are valued, included, and supported to flourish.



About Centre for Muslim Wellbeing

Who we are

The Centre for Muslim Wellbeing (CMW) is a not-for-profit, community-led organisation established in 2018, dedicated to improving the mental health, spiritual wellbeing, and social inclusion of Muslim communities in Victoria. Established in response to a critical need for culturally and faith-informed care, CMW is grounded in lived experience, guided by evidence, and driven by community partnership.

We work at the intersection of mental health, community development, and faith-based healing, serving as a trusted bridge between government, services, and communities. Our work honours the diversity of Muslim identities and promotes dignity, resilience, and collective care across generations.

Through partnerships with primary health networks, schools, universities, faith leaders and community organisations, CMW has reached thousands of community members through mental health literacy programs, trauma recovery initiatives, youth wellbeing programs, cultural responsiveness training, and policy engagement.

This work provides CMW with direct insight into the systemic barriers affecting Muslim and multicultural communities, including those experienced by students within higher education settings.

What we do

CMW delivers a wide range of culturally responsive initiatives and advocacy efforts, including:

- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and suicide postvention training** tailored for Muslim and multicultural communities
- **Healing circles and trauma recovery programs**, including faith-informed group work, grief workshops, and collective resilience initiatives
- **Youth and men's wellbeing programs** incorporating spiritual mentorship, mental fitness, and psycho-social education
- **Cultural intelligence (CQ) and anti-racism training** for schools, workplaces, and frontline services to strengthen service inclusivity
- **Community peer support initiatives** for carers, new migrants, and women, designed to reduce isolation and build community capacity
- **Policy advocacy and systems engagement** to ensure Muslim voices are embedded in mental health reform, anti-racism strategies, and multicultural policy

Through partnerships with primary health networks, faith leaders, education providers, and grassroots organisations, CMW has reached thousands of community members across Victoria, delivering practical impact while championing systemic change.

Table of Content

Pages

01	Executive Summary
02	Introduction
03	Strengthening access through culturally responsive navigation
05	Reducing reliance on crisis-based entry points & Supporting the missing middle through community-based pathways
06	Embedding early intervention through community connection & Opportunities for system strengthening
07	Conclusion

1. Executive Summary

The Centre for Muslim Wellbeing (CMW) welcomes the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission's Issues Paper, which examines changes in responses to mental health crises in the community. Since the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, important progress has occurred across the sector, including the establishment of Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals, greater integration of lived-experience roles, stronger collaboration between community and clinical services, and the expansion of alternative crisis-response pathways.

These reforms represent meaningful steps toward a more community-based, person-centred, and relational mental health system.

At the same time, significant structural barriers remain for many multicultural communities, particularly Muslim communities, in accessing and engaging with mental health support. While stigma is often discussed as a barrier to care, CMW's experience demonstrates that help-seeking is also shaped by experiences of Islamophobia, racism, cultural misunderstanding, language barriers, lack of trust in mainstream systems, and difficulties navigating fragmented service pathways.

These barriers frequently delay engagement until distress escalates into crisis.

Drawing on eight years of applied practice in culturally responsive mental health navigation and community-based service delivery, CMW's submission highlights the critical role of culturally responsive navigation as an early-intervention infrastructure.

CMW's model operates as a trusted, community-based access pathway that supports individuals to:

- Navigate complex mental health systems
- Identify culturally aligned practitioners and services
- Engage safely and earlier with care
- Maintain continuity of support during periods of vulnerability

This work demonstrates that navigation is not simply administrative support, but a core component of mental health engagement, prevention, and equity.

The submission also highlights the importance of strengthening community-based pathways that reduce reliance on emergency departments and acute services as primary entry points into care. Embedding culturally responsive support within trusted community settings increases early help-seeking, improves alignment between needs and services, and reduces avoidable escalation into crisis presentations.

1. Executive Summary



CMW further notes that community-led organisations are already playing a significant role in navigation, trust-building, early intervention, and system engagement across multicultural communities, often without sustained structural investment or infrastructure funding.

Summary of recommendations

The issues identified in the Commission's paper reinforce the need to:

- Strengthen culturally responsive navigation pathways
- Expand community-based entry points into care
- Build stronger partnerships between community organisations and formal mental health services
- Embed cultural responsiveness within core system design
- Sustain investment in community-led mental health infrastructure

CMW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next phase of mental health reform and to support the development of a system that is more accessible, equitable, culturally responsive, and prevention-focused for all communities.

2. Introduction

The Centre for Muslim Wellbeing (CMW) welcomes the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission's 2026 issues paper examining changes in responses to mental health crises in the community.

CMW contributed to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, drawing on community consultation and practitioner insight to identify systemic gaps in navigation, culturally responsive care, and access pathways for Muslim and other culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The report identifies meaningful progress across the system, including the establishment of new service types, stronger integration across services, and the expansion of lived experience roles. These developments reflect a shift toward more community-based, relational, and person-centred models of care.

CMW recognises the scale and complexity of this reform effort. The issues paper also highlights ongoing challenges in navigation, access, and clarity of pathways into care. These are structural issues that continue to shape how individuals engage with the system, particularly at points of crisis.

CMW's response is provided in this context, drawing on eight years of applied practice in community-based mental health navigation and culturally responsive service delivery.

Progress since the Royal Commission

The issues paper identifies several areas of progress contributing to improved crisis response experiences.

These include:

- The establishment of Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals
- Increased integration of lived experience roles across services
- Strengthened relationships between community and clinical services
- Development of alternative crisis response models beyond emergency departments

These developments represent important system shifts. They expand access points, support relational engagement, and create greater flexibility in how care is delivered. CMW's work operates within and alongside these developments, focusing on strengthening access pathways and supporting earlier engagement.

3. Strengthening access through culturally responsive navigation

The issues paper identifies ongoing challenges in locating appropriate services and navigating pathways into care.

For many Muslim and multicultural communities, barriers to engagement are not solely related to stigma. Experiences of Islamophobia, cultural misunderstanding, language barriers, and lack of trust in mainstream systems can significantly shape help-seeking behaviour and delay engagement until distress escalates further.

These factors highlight the importance of culturally responsive navigation and relational approaches that support individuals to engage with care in ways that feel safe, trusted, and contextually appropriate.

CMW has established a culturally responsive navigation model that directly addresses these challenges. This model has been embedded within the organisation since 2018 and refined over eight years through sustained engagement with community members, practitioners, and the broader system.

A core component of this model is a curated and continuously evolving database of culturally and linguistically diverse Muslim therapists and mental health professionals. This infrastructure increases visibility of culturally aligned services and strengthens referral pathways across community and clinical settings.

This enables:

- Clear identification of culturally aligned practitioners across disciplines
- Greater visibility of services not readily accessible through mainstream pathways
- More consistent and informed referral practices across sectors

CMW's navigation model functions as a community-based access and engagement infrastructure operating alongside formal mental health services. It provides structured, active support to guide individuals through the system in a culturally informed, contextually responsive way.

This includes:

- Direct navigation support to identify and access appropriate care pathways
- Practical tools and decision-making frameworks that simplify system entry
- Strengthened referral linkages between community organisations, primary care, and specialist services

3. Strengthening access through culturally responsive navigation

Navigation capability is supported internally through embedded cultural responsiveness and ongoing workforce development.

This includes:

- Strengthening cultural capability within navigation and assessment processes
- Applying culturally informed understanding to complex and intersectional presentations
- Continuous refinement of navigation pathways based on community need and system feedback

This model represents an applied response to system-level navigation challenges. Community-based organisations often serve as trusted intermediaries between individuals and the formal mental health system, particularly for communities with lower levels of trust in or familiarity with mainstream services. Relational engagement and trust-building are therefore critical components of effective navigation and early intervention.

It shifts navigation from passive information provision to an active, relational process that supports earlier engagement and more effective connection to care. In practice, culturally responsive navigation is not separate from mental health support itself; it is a core component of how individuals safely access, engage with, and remain connected to care

4. Reducing reliance on crisis-based entry points

The issues paper identifies continued reliance on emergency departments as primary entry points into care.

CMW's model strengthens access to earlier, community-based pathways, supporting engagement before escalation to crisis.

Embedding navigation and support within trusted community settings increases the likelihood of early help-seeking and improves alignment between individual needs and available services. Strengthening culturally responsive early intervention pathways is also critical to broader system sustainability. Without accessible, community-based supports that enable earlier engagement, demand will continue to accumulate at the crisis end of the system, placing increasing pressure on emergency departments, acute services, and first responders.

This contributes to:

- Earlier engagement with mental health support
- Reduced reliance on emergency departments as initial access points
- Improved matching of needs to appropriate service responses

This approach strengthens system efficiency by reducing avoidable escalation and pressure on crisis services.

5. Supporting the missing middle through community-based pathways

The issues paper highlights ongoing gaps for individuals whose needs fall between primary care and acute services.

CMW's navigation model provides structured support for this cohort through guided access to appropriate services and continuity of engagement.

This includes:

- Supporting individuals to navigate available service options
- Facilitating connection across community and clinical care
- Maintaining engagement during periods of vulnerability

This strengthens system responsiveness and reduces the likelihood of deterioration that would require crisis intervention.

6. Embedding early intervention through community connection

CMW's work is grounded in community-based engagement and early intervention.

This includes:

- Delivering mental health awareness and wellbeing programs
- Building mental health literacy within community contexts
- Supporting early identification of distress

Community-embedded approaches strengthen trust, reduce stigma, and increase the likelihood of early engagement.

Community demand for culturally responsive navigation, wellbeing support, and early intervention continues to grow, often beyond the resourcing capacity of community-led organisations operating without sustained infrastructure funding.

This aligns with the broader system objective of shifting from crisis response toward prevention and early intervention.

7. Opportunities for system strengthening

The issues paper identifies opportunities to strengthen navigation, improve access, and expand community-based responses.

CMW's work demonstrates how these can be operationalised in practice.

Key opportunities include:

- Establishing clear and usable navigation pathways that support real-time decision making
- Strengthening partnerships between community organisations and formal mental health services
- Embedding culturally responsive approaches within core system design
- Expanding accessible entry points into care beyond emergency settings

8. Conclusion



The Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission’s 2026 issues paper highlights both progress and ongoing structural challenges in responding to mental health crises in the community.

CMW’s work demonstrates that navigation, access, and cultural responsiveness can be addressed through applied, community-based models that support earlier engagement and more effective connection to care.

The issues identified in the Commission’s paper reinforce the importance of sustained investment in culturally responsive, community-based mental health infrastructure. Community-led organisations are already playing a critical role in supporting navigation, early intervention, trust-building, and engagement across multicultural communities, often without long-term structural support.

CMW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next phase of system reform and to work in partnership to strengthen access, equity, and responsiveness across the mental health system.



CENTRE FOR MUSLIM WELLBEING

Contact Us

Executive Officer, Ayman Islam –
executiveofficer@cmw.org.au
Email: admin@cmw.org.au
Phone: (03) 9125 4229

CMW.ORG.AU

